

A Selection of Hellenistic Greek Inscriptions

Prepared by Prof. Colburn for ARCH B222 (Fall 2026)

1. Athens, Greece, 294 BCE

This inscription records a decree of the Athenians honoring a man named Herodoros. Why is Herodoros being honored? What privileges have the Athenians conferred upon him? Why do you think they voted in favor of this?

Gods. In the archonship of Nikostratos, in Demetrias' *prytany*¹ (which is) the ninth, Elaphebolion's ninth (day), fifteenth of the *prytany*.² Main assembly. The motion was put to the vote by (the chairman) of the *proedroi*...³ from Acharnai and by his fellow *proedroi*.⁴

Resolved by the People. Gorgos, son of Phryni... introduced the motion. Since Herodoros, before, while residing with King Antigonos,⁵ was sympathetic to the people of the Athenians and now, being a confidant of King Demetrios,⁶ (whatever) good he can, he does publicly on behalf of the city and privately on behalf of each Athenian who at any time asks; and, moreover, he is said by the ambassadors, who were sent concerning peace to King Demetrios, to have aided the People in arranging both friendship with King Demetrios and that the People, having been freed from the war as soon as possible and having recovered the city, might continue to have democracy; with good fortune, it has been resolved by the People that it praise Herodoros, son of PN⁷... for the good will and zeal which he continues to have for the people of the Athenians and that it crown him with a gold wreath in accordance with the law and that it proclaim the wreath at the competition for tragedies in honor of Dionysos in the city. In addition, he shall be an Athenian together with his descendants, and he shall be enrolled in whatever tribe and deme and *phratry*⁸ he

¹ An *archon* was a high-ranking civic official who served for a single year. Thus the name of the archon could be used to indicate a specific year. The *prytany* was a group of civic officials (called *prytaneis*) who managed the city for one tenth of the year.

² I.e., the fifteenth day of the ninth month of the Athenian calendar (in April).

³ The ellipsis indicates that part of the inscription is missing and cannot be restored even conjecturally.

⁴ The *proedroi* were the presidents of the assembly, i.e., of the citizen body of Athens.

⁵ Antigonos Monophthalmos (r. 306–301 BCE), one of Alexander's generals and the founder of the Antigonid dynasty.

⁶ Demetrios Poliorketes (r. 294–288 BCE), son of Antigonos Monophthalmos.

⁷ PN = 'personal name' (the name is illegible in the text of the inscription).

⁸ Every Athenian citizen was a member of a tribe, a deme (effectively a geographic zone in the region of Attica) and a *phratry* (a kinship group). These were used for voting purposes, like modern electoral districts.

wishes, and he shall have also the right of maintenance in the *prytaneion*,⁹ and (likewise) the eldest of his descendants in each generation together with a front seat at all contests which the city holds. There shall also be set up by the People a bronze statue of him in the Agora next to Harmodios and Aristogeiton and the Saviors,¹⁰ and there shall be chosen by the People three men from all the Athenians who shall supervise the manufacture of the statue; and there shall be allocated to them by the *exetastes* and the *trittarchs*¹¹ for the statue whatever costs are incurred; and the *prytaneis* shall schedule the vote concerning him for the next assembly; and the *thesmothetai*¹² shall bring the scrutiny of his citizenship and of his gift before the court in accordance with the law as soon as the juries have been impaneled by them. This decree shall be inscribed by the secretary for the *prytany* on a stone stele and set up on the Akropolis, and for the inscribing of the stele the financial administrator shall pay.

Source: S. M. Burstein, *The Hellenistic Age from the Battle of Ipsos to the Death of Kleopatra VII* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), no. 6.

2. Samos, Greece, 283/2 BCE

This inscription contains the text of a letter sent by King Lysimachos to the people of Samos announcing his decision in a dispute between the Samians and the Prieneans over a territory called "the Batinetis." Why do you think Samos and Priene appealed to Lysimachos to decide this dispute? What can you deduce from the decision about the arguments made by each side? Why do you think they made these arguments, and on what grounds did Lysimachos make his decision?

King Lysimachos to the Boule¹³ and the people of the Samians, greeting. There appeared before us both the ambassadors from you and the Prieneans, (ambassadors) who were sent concerning the land about which they happened to have contested before us previously. If, therefore, we had known that you had possessed and occupied this land for so many years, we would not have taken on the case at all, but, as it was, we thought that your entry had been very recent, for so we had been informed in their

⁹ I.e., he can receive free meals at public expense alongside the serving *prytaneis*.

¹⁰ Harmodios and Aristogeiton killed Hipparchos, the brother of Hippias, the tyrant of Athens, in 514 BCE, for which they were executed. The Athenians subsequently celebrated them as liberators and erected statues of them in the Agora.

¹¹ The *exetastes* (inspectors) and *trittarchs* (leaders of the *trittyes*, each comprising one third of the citizen body of Athens) were responsible for creating public inscriptions at this time.

¹² The *thesmothetai* were civic officials in Athens ranking between the archons and the *prytaneis*.

¹³ The executive council of the city, elected by its citizens.

previous speeches by the Prienean ambassadors. But, indeed, when both your (ambassadors) were present and those of the Prieneans, it was necessary to hear through the statements of each. The Prieneans, therefore, attempted to demonstrate their original possession of the territory (known as) the Batinetis both from histories and other proofs and documents including the Six Years Truce.¹⁴ But they conceded that later, when Lygdamis¹⁵ invaded Ionia with his army, the rest left the territory and the Samians withdrew to the island. Lygdamis, having occupied it for three years, returned these same possessions to them, and the Prieneans took possession and no Samian was present at all then unless one happened to have settled among them, and he contributed his harvest to the Prieneans; but later the Samians, returning with force, seized the territory; Bias,¹⁶ therefore, was sent by the Prieneans to effect a reconciliation with the Samians with full authority, and he reconciled the cities, and the settlers withdrew from the territory (known as) the Batinetis.

Source: S. M. Burstein, *The Hellenistic Age from the Battle of Ipsos to the Death of Kleopatra VII* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), no. 12.

3. Xanthos, Lykia (modern Kınık, Türkiye), 205 BCE

This inscription records the formal response by the people of Xanthos, at the time part of the Ptolemaic overseas empire, to an embassy from Kytenion, a small city in the region of Doris in central Greece, about 140 km northwest of Athens. The Kytenians were seeking financial contributions to rebuild their city walls, which had been destroyed in an earthquake. Why did the Kytenians ask the Xanthians for help? How did the Xanthians respond? Why do you think the Xanthians inscribed their response?

In the seventeenth year of the rule of Ptolemy,¹⁷ son of Ptolemy and Berenike, the *Theoi Euergetai*, Ptolemaios son of Andronikos son of Perlamos was priest of the *Theoi Euergetai* and of King Ptolemy,¹⁸ and when Tlepolemos son of Artapates was priest

¹⁴ A truce between the Samians and Prieneans, negotiated in the mid-sixth century BCE by Bias of Priene.

¹⁵ Lygdamis was a Kimmerian king who led an invasion of Anatolia in the sixth century BCE. Around 644 he attacked Ionia, including, evidently, the territory of Priene.

¹⁶ Bias was a Prienean sage who lived during the sixth century BCE.

¹⁷ Ptolemy VI (r. 221–204 BCE), king of Egypt.

¹⁸ Ptolemaic rulers, like Egyptian pharaohs, were worshipped during their reigns and after their deaths, in the latter instance as *Theoi Euergetai* (“benefactor gods”).

before the city, on the second of Audnaios,¹⁹ this resolution was made by the city and the officials:

Whereas the following ambassadors – Lamprias, Ainetos and Phegeus, Dorians²⁰ of the Metropolis coming from Kytenion – have arrived from the Aitolian Confederation,²¹ bearing a decree from the Aitolians and a letter from the Dorians, by virtue of which – having explained the events that have befallen their homeland and speaking in a manner consonant with the contents of the letter – the ambassadors most zealously and eagerly exhort us to remember our kinship-relations²² with them, that originate from the gods and heroes, and hence to refuse to tolerate that the walls of their homeland lie destroyed – since, they said, Leto, our city’s founding deity,²³ gave birth to Artemis and Apollo in our land and Asklepios was born in Doris to Apollo and Koronis daughter of Phlegynos son of Doros,²⁴ and therefore, having established through this genealogy that they possess such divinely originated kinship-relations with us, they enjoy an interwoven kinship and relationship with us that derived from the heroes, as they showed by establishing the genealogy from Aiolos and Doros; and since, they also demonstrated, when colonists led by Chrysaor son of Glaukos²⁵ son of Hippolochos left our land, Aletes,²⁶ one of the Herakleidai, took care of them, because, they said, Aletes set out from Doris to help the settlers when they were being reduced by war, drove away the danger, and married the daughter of Aor son of Chrysaor – and so, having demonstrated through a great many other details the close goodwill that they had developed towards us from olden times, the ambassadors asked us not to tolerate that the greatest city in the Metropolis be thrown to the ground, but to give help for the rebuilding of its walls in so far as we find it possible, and to make conspicuous to the Greeks the goodwill which we have towards the Aitolian Confederation and the Kytenians’ city by helping them in a way that is worthy of our ancestors and ourselves: and they said that, by listening to them in this matter, we would please not only them, but also the Aitolians and all

¹⁹ Audnaios was the third month of the Macedonian calendar (used in many Hellenistic kingdoms), roughly corresponding to November.

²⁰ Along with the Aiolians, Achaians and Ionians, the Dorians were one of the four major ethnic groups into which the ancient Greeks organized themselves. The Greeks considered Kytenion to be located within the traditional homeland (i.e., the metropolis) of the Dorians.

²¹ The Aitolian Confederation was a political and military alliance of Greek cities and communities in central Greece during the early Hellenistic period, of which Kytenion was a member.

²² The Greek word *syngeneia* literally means ‘shared descent’ or ‘common ancestry.’

²³ Leto was the primary goddess of Xanthos.

²⁴ Asklepios, the Greek healer god, was the son of Apollo and Koronis, a granddaughter of Doros, the progenitor of the Dorians.

²⁵ Glaukos was a Lykian prince mentioned in the *Iliad* (Xanthos is in Lykia).

²⁶ Aletes was a fifth- or sixth-generation descendant of Herakles who became king of Corinth.

the other Dorians, and especially King Ptolemy, since he is a kinsman of the Dorians by the Argead kings²⁷ descended from Herakles.

Be it resolved to give them an answer to this sympathize concerning the misfortunes believe it fitting to listen zealously to urge because of the kinship-relations that heroes, and because King Ptolemy, being traces his kinship back to the kings born not the case that the public finances of Xanthians would have made clear their goodwill by their generosity; but that – since the since a great mass of debts has arisen, on the citizens because of the voting of the richest of the citizens have recently these current circumstances, about which we have spoken to the ambassadors, the city, for all these reasons, has thinks it terrible to tolerate that kinsmen should have fallen into such misfortune; and that (therefore) it was resolved: that the officials shall borrow money and give the ambassadors 500 *drachmai*²⁸ for the walls of their city, and send them a hospitality gift as legally specified; that the officials shall inscribe the Aitolians’ decree and the letter written by the *strategoi*²⁹ and *synedroi* on a stone stele to be set up in the shrine of Leto, together with the letter sent by the Dorians to the city and this decree; that this (the decree) shall be given to the ambassadors; and that they shall be invited to a hospitality meal.

Source: J. Ma, “Peer Polity Interaction in the Hellenistic Age,” *Past & Present* 180 (2003), 9–39 (at 10–12).

4. Magnesia on the Maiandros, Asia Minor (modern Tekin, Türkiye), ca. 205 BCE

This inscription is a copy of a decree passed by Antioch in Persis recognizing the festival of Artemis Leukophryene at Magnesia on the Maiandros. Why do you think the Antiochenes recognized the festival of Artemis? Why would the Magnesians inscribe this decree in their city?

(Decision) of the citizens of Antioch in Persis.³⁰ In the year in which the priest of Seleukos Nikator and of Antiochos Soter and of Antiochos Theos and of Seleukos Kallinikos and of King Seleukos and of King Antiochos (III) and of the son of King

²⁷ The Argead dynasty, of which Alexander was a member, ruled ancient Macedonia. It believed it was descended from Herakles.

²⁸ It is difficult to estimate the buying power of ancient coins. A single *drachma* was the usual wage for a soldier, so 500 drachmai is no more than a year and fourth months’ salary for a single soldier.

²⁹ The *strategoi* (literally ‘generals’) were civic officials in many Greek cities, including Xanthos.

³⁰ ‘Persis’ is the Greek name for the region of Fars in southwestern Iran, the homeland of the Persians. The location of Antioch in Persis remains uncertain; probably it was near the Bushehr peninsula.

Antiochos³¹ was Herakleitos, the son of Zoes, first six-month (period), decisions of the main assembly, which were recorded by Asklepiades, the son of Hekataios, the son of Demetrios, the secretary of the Boule and of the assembly, month Pantheos, third day before the end of the month; resolved by the assembly, the *prytaneis* introduced the motion.

The citizens of Magnesia on the Maeander, being kinsmen and friends of the People and having performed many conspicuous services on behalf of the Greeks of the sort which lead to good repute, both formerly when Antiochos Soter, being zealous to strengthen our city, which was named for him, wrote to them concerning a colony, they voted fine and notable decrees and, offering prayers and sacrifices, sent an adequate number of men who were distinguished for their excellence because they were eager to assist in strengthening the people of Antioch; and (now) preserving their good will toward all the Greeks and wishing to make clear that to all their kinsmen they give a share of the libations and sacrifices and of the other honors, which relate to the divinity, because a revelation has been granted to them, they have declared through all Greece that they will celebrate in honor of the foundress of their city³² sacrifices and a festival and a truce and wreathed games every fifth year – musical and athletic and equestrian – (thus) returning just thanks to their benefactress.

They have sent as ambassadors to the People Demophon, son of Lykideus, Philiskos, son of Philos, Pheres, son of Pheres, who, on appearing before the Boule and the assembly, duly handed over the decree of the Magnesians; and, after renewing their kinship and friendship, they recounted at length the goddess' manifestation and the services which the Magnesians have furnished to many Greek cities, and they urged that we recognize the wreathed games which they will celebrate in honor of Artemis Leukophryene in accordance with the oracle of the god. (Since these things are so), the People, because it reveres the gods common to it and the Magnesians and desires to increase its goodwill toward its kinsmen and many other cities, which have decreed these same things... (and) especially because it thinks it ought not to pass over any suitable occasion on which both to each individually and to all in common it might demonstrate the zeal which it continues to have for the advantage of the Magnesians; with good fortune, it has been resolved by the Boule and the People that they praise

³¹ The rulers listed here are the kings of the Seleukid Empire: Seleukos I (r. 305-281 BCE), Antiochos I (r. 281-261), Antiochos II (r. 261-246), Seleukos II (r. 246-225), Seleukos II (r. 225-223) and Antiochos III (r. 223-187). The 'son of King Antiochos' is probably the eldest son of Antiochos III, also named Antiochos, who died in 193.

³² I.e., Artemis Leukophryene, mentioned by name below.

the Magnesians for their piety toward the divinity and for their friendship and good will toward King Antiochos and the people of Antioch, and because, by using well their own advantages and the prosperity of their city, they will preserve their ancestral constitution. Prayer shall be offered by the priests to all the gods and goddesses that the Magnesians maintain for all time in good fortune their constitution. Further, recognition shall be accorded to the sacrifice and the festival and the sacred truce and the wreathed games as equivalent to the Pythian³³ – the musical and the athletic and equestrian –which the Magnesians will celebrate (in honor) of Artemis Leukophryene because of the ancestral ... and the citizens of Antioch shall also send sacred ambassadors to Magnesia to sacrifice to Artemis Leukophryene for the security of the king and of both the cities, and they shall receive a travel allowance from the public fund in the amount which the People shall determine by vote (to be) sufficient and proper for the city. The sacred ambassadors shall be chosen on the... of the month of Herakleios, when other governmental offices are filled, and those chosen shall be sent from the common hearth of the People. The sacred ambassadors, who come from Magnesia to us shall be given by the treasurers from the public fund gifts of hospitality such as are given also to embassies from rulers and cities. The sacred ambassadors shall join in sacrificing... Artemis Leukophryene the... Those citizens who shall be victorious in the contests of the Leukophryenia shall receive the same honors and benefits from the city as those who have been victorious in the Pythian games receive according to the law.

Similar resolutions were also passed by the Seleukeians near the Tigris,³⁴ the Apameians near the Sellas, the Seleukeians by the Erythraean Sea,³⁵ the Seleukeians near the (Eu)laios,³⁶ the Seleukeians by the..., the Antiochenes by..., the Alexandrians...

Source: S. M. Burstein, *The Hellenistic Age from the Battle of Ipsos to the Death of Kleopatra VII* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), no. 32.

³³ The Pythian games were celebrated at Delphi in honor of Apollo. Along with the Olympic, Nemean and Isthmian games, they were one of the four major Panhellenic festivals.

³⁴ The original capital of the Seleukid Empire, near modern Baghdad.

³⁵ Both Apameia near the Sellas and Seleukeia by the Erythraean Sea were likely located in southern Iraq.

³⁶ The Greek name of the city of Susa in southwestern Iran.